

Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education

DC Great Start: A Comprehensive Early Care and  
Education Action Plan for the District of Columbia  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - DRAFT



This Executive Summary captures the deliberations of a series of meetings convened by the office of the Deputy Mayor of Education during the months of February and March of 2007. The recommendations were reviewed on several occasions by a working group of expert advisors representing the following sectors: Department of Human Services, Office of the State Superintendent of Education (formerly the State Education Office), District of Columbia Public Schools, the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Early Care Development (MACECD), University of the District of Columbia, Department of Health, Department of Mental Health, and Public Charter School Board. **The full report is available by contacting the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education.**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years there has been mounting evidence of the importance of the early years in a child's educational success. New research indicates that the early years have an important impact on the architecture of the brain. Early experiences, particularly nurturing relationships, can have a long term impact on learning, behavior, and health. Recent research on Early Head Start and long term studies of preschool programs indicate that investments in the early years can affect the trajectory of children as they move into the primary grades. Specifically, findings from three seminal research studies show that enrollment in quality early childhood programs results in enhanced pre-literacy and social/behavioral skills, improved performance on primary school tests, reduction in the number of special education placements, and an increase in high school graduation rates.<sup>1</sup> The studies also show that investments in early care and education are cost effective because they reduce the costs of remediation of problems that could have been addressed earlier in a child's life. In response to the body of evidence and strong advocacy by the early childhood community, states and localities have increased investments in early childhood education. Investments in early childhood now include both federal funding for Head Start and Child Care and state support.

The importance and effectiveness of early childhood care and education is clear, but what is also clear is that these services are expensive and, in the District, they are not well coordinated. A comprehensive plan will guide and maximize future investment and move the District toward increased access for all children to quality early childhood care and education.

### *Status of Early Care and Education (ECE) services in the District of Columbia*

The District has met important milestones in ensuring access to quality early care and education. The Early Care and Education Administration (ECEA) has expanded access to subsidized child care to 68% of eligible children, collaborated with the public school system in the development of pre-K standards that can improve the quality of teaching across programs when applied system-wide, established an incentive system for improving the quality of child care providers, increased the pool of credentialed teachers, strengthened child care providers' capacity to serve children with special needs through a variety of professional development workshops, and provided early intervention services to infants and toddlers with potential developmental delays and disabilities. Moreover, in collaboration with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the ECEA administers the Pre-K Incentive Program, a model that provides multiple services to three- and four-year olds in community centers throughout the city.

---

<sup>1</sup> Abecedarian (1972), Chicago (1985), and High Scope (1962).

Finally, the ECEA's Early Readers Now Program supports development of pre-literacy skills by pairing volunteer readers with young children.

Despite multiple challenges in its recent history, the DCPS early childhood programs have accomplished some key goals worthy of notice. The District has one of the highest rates of participation in full-day pre-K programs in the country. In addition, all teachers of three- and four-year olds are highly qualified by national standards. District teachers have specialized education and training in child development and possess the same educational credentials as K-12 teachers and have the opportunity to participate in on-going professional development seminars in early childhood education.

### *Seeking Service Coherence and Accountability*

While the accomplishments of the current ECE delivery system are impressive, significant challenges remain. These challenges include government fragmentation in the management and delivery of services, limited or no transparency of information regarding the nature of services provided or their outcomes, and inadequate accountability across systems.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the quality of services delivered across the spectrum of providers—home-based, center-based, and public school—needs improvement. The Fenty Administration is poised to address these challenges by creating a seamless and coherent early childhood education delivery system from before birth to age five.

This Administration envisions a system in which there is a clear understanding among government officials, service providers, and the public at large of the District's mission for early care and education and a unified determination to deploy the multiplicity of fiscal and human resources to make it happen. The Administration will cultivate a shift in thinking from an exclusive focus on particular isolated services driven by the funding streams to a system in which services and dollars are used flexibly to meet the needs of young children.

To realize the Administration's vision of early care and education we will undertake several short- and long-term actions as outlined in this plan. We will build on the recommendations of three important documents: the Mayor's Committee on Early Childhood Development Task Force on Strategic Planning for Infant and Toddlers, the Roadmap to Universal School Readiness, and the Transition Team Workgroup. These three documents provide the foundation for the set of recommendations for children 0-5 in the District.

---

<sup>2</sup> Fenty Education e-Transition Early Care and Education Work Group Recommendations, December 28, 2006.

This document is a first response to the Mayor's request to the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education for a multi-year early care and education plan.<sup>3</sup> It is a broad outline of an early care and education plan for the District of Columbia and will be refined and transformed in the coming months into a comprehensive early care and education plan. Prior to the release of the final plan the Deputy Mayor's office will conduct an assessment of existing structures to identify best practices and areas in need of improvement. In addition, the final plan will specify costs of recommendations. The recommendations are organized by age clusters: birth to three; three and four year olds; and finally birth to five. The last section focuses on those broad policy issues that overlap age clusters. This structure acknowledges the differences within the birth to five population that require age specific or cross-age approaches depending on the need to be addressed.

---

<sup>3</sup> 100 Days and Beyond: 2007 Action Plan for the District of Columbia. January 11, 2007.

## Selected Task Force Recommendations<sup>4</sup>

### *Birth to Three:*

- Explore options to expand Early Head Start programs.
- Improve quality of infant care by developing a network of infant and toddler specialists that work with programs.
- Expand and reinvigorate the Home Visiting Council.
- Increase funding to the Healthy Start Healthy Families program.
- Direct the appropriate DC agency to conduct a study of the fiscal, programmatic, and personnel impact of changing the eligibility criteria for serving children under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Conduct an assessment of impediments to coordination of IDEA Part C and Part B services to children with special needs.
- Request that DOH and DMH submit plans to the Mayor that delineate how they intend to improve the services to young children [birth to five] and their families.

### *Pre-School and Pre-Kindergarten*

- Expand quality pre-school services to three year olds.
- Modify Pre-K standards to accommodate three year olds.
- Explore the option of creating alternative routes to certification for teachers.
- Convene a leadership meeting to seek viable solutions to the problem of differential pay for EC teachers.

### *Birth to Five*

- Release the MACECD Task Force report on Strategic Planning for Infants and Toddlers.
- Increase on-site professional development opportunities for all child care workers regardless of place of work.
- Assess the return on investment of partnerships with institutions of higher education.
- Develop school readiness indicators.
- Include ECE data elements/indicators in the district-wide data collection and reporting system.
- Establish a Public/Private Partnership to support the actions outlined in the EC plan.
- Increase parent understanding of early childhood development and literacy.

---

<sup>4</sup> Note: Cost of implementation will be determined prior to release of this document in final format.